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CIA's Shocked Critics 19 Feb 67

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THE CURRENT CRIES of agitation over the Central Intelligence agency's funding of certain academic groups seem to us a bit overdone. That usually seems to happen with any issue involving the CIA; the name itself evidently carries a heavy emotional charge, like the word "spy."

Eleven groups have now been identified as having received money from the CIA thru various foundations connected with it. The subsidies are being attacked for a wide variety of reasons, good and bad. Critics from the far left seem furious that the CIA should be guilty of spying against those nice, trusting Communists; those of the right are denouncing the CIA for having given money to a liberal-left organization like the National Student association [on the theory, evidently, that intelligence work in Communist countries should be trusted only to people plainly labeled "Anti-Communist"].

The reasonable critics point out the loss of credibility and prestige that these groups have suffered. They rightly complain that it will damage people—former NSA members, for instance—who are now doing important work for the government abroad, and who had no knowledge of the CIA link to their organization.

The latter critics have a point. The loss is heavy, and we have no way of knowing whether it is outweighed by the gains since we can't see the gains. Moreover the loss in credibility is exclusively ours; Communist student groups had none to lose, being unabashedly agents of their government.

But the point of all this, to our mind, is that you can't have it both ways. We are in a game of deception against a clever and unscrupulous enemy; we can either try to be sportsmanlike, or try to win.

From the intelligence point of view, the subsidy arrangement was a gamble whose price was known from the start. The gamble worked for a long time and has now run out of luck. For intelligence purposes, groups like the NSA were valuable precisely because they seemed so independent from the government; their antigovernment stance on some issues added to their value. Criticisms like that of Rep. Donald Lukens [R., O.], who called the payments "shocking and scandalous" because the NSA is left of center, may kindly be called innocent. We should not expect our spies to report for work waving American flags.

The situation is certainly saddening. Like an industry using up raw material, the CIA uses up credibility. Thru the NSA it has now bought and used up the credibility of student groups as independent bodies; no major student organization now will be quite free of suspicion as a possible CIA helper, wherever it stands politically.

No one can like this dismal trade or defend it on its own merits. But let us be fair. Do we want intelligence work done? Is there any way to do it without using deception on a large scale? And is there any form of mass deception that does not involve, sooner or later, a heavy cost in disillusionment?